**An Interview with Tess Perry**

**By Oakley, the dog**

**Oakley:** How do you feel now that you are finishing up your practicum portfolio?

**Tess:** Tired.

**Oakley:** That’s it?

**Tess:** I am also very proud of myself. The amount of work I have accomplished in a short amount of time is truly amazing to me. I did not know I was capable of producing this much, quality work.

**Oakley:** Could you describe what you have learned since January?

**Tess**: Being a teacher is not all about you. You have to set aside your opinions, attitudes and preferences to find what will work best for students. In my first assignment, the essential belief statement, I expressed that I enjoyed lecture style teaching methods. Not only do I now know why I like this style (I am a clipboard learner) I know that I should not use it in my classroom if I want successful students. Students need to be engaged in the content to absorb, understand and remember the information. This concept was clearly laid out for me in the Multiple Intelligences and Fair isn’t Always Equal textbooks. This also became very clear to me when designing lessons that addressed all the multiple intelligences and learning styles. If my students are successful then I will be a satisfied and happy teacher!

**Oakley:** Could you tell me more about designing lessons?

**Tess:** After determining different strategies and activities that appeal to different students these aspects helped me plan lesson agendas and instructional methods. I actually found some enjoyment during those late nights fitting all the pieces together and coming up with different ways, means and techniques to disseminate information. Also I cannot talk about creating lessons and units without mentioning the backward design concept. When this idea was introduced, with the help of the Understanding by Design and Differentiated Instruction textbook, it instantly clicked for me!

**Oakley:** What do you mean, “instantly clicked”? Remember, I’m a dog, explain more!

**Tess:** The idea behind backward design is that you have design a unit around the end goals. The end goals are what do you want students to know and be able to do when you are done this unit? Then you create lessons, which are the small building blocks to help students make progress towards the unit goal. I equated this to any goal in life, if you know where you want to be, what are the small steps to help you get there, which is also the topic of my unit. For example, if you want to chase your tennis ball you have to drop it at my feet so I can throw it and you can chase it. If I just tell you to drop it without any intention or understanding that this will help you chase the ball you won’t understand why you need to do that.

**Oakley:** Huh?

**Tess:** Well you are just a dog, so maybe you still won’t understand why you need to drop the ball. I do think my future students will be a little more developmentally advanced than you and I’m not going to be teaching them how to play fetch.

**Oakley:** You’re distracting with all this talk about a ball. Next question, so if you know how to design really awesome lessons keeping the unit goal in mind while simultaneously using different teaching methods that engage all different learning styles and types, how will you know your lessons are so awesome that your students are actually learning, understanding and connecting.

**Tess:** Before this course I had never really given too much thought to assessment. But that is an excellent question, how do teachers know students are getting it? The answer lies in the use of checking for understanding regularly throughout lessons, through project based assessment that requires higher order thinking and allowing students to re-do work. There is a plethora of quick and simple ways to check with students mid-lesson to see if they are grasping the content. One of my personal favorites is an exit pass. Students must respond to a short prompt (for example: write one thing your learned today and one thing you need more time to think about) to be handed to the teacher upon exiting the room. I used others in my unit such as thumbs up/down, example/non-example and every pupil respond. The project based assessments definitely take a little more planning than checking for understanding. But, basically, by assigning a project that summarizes a lesson (or unit for a final assessment), engaging students to create their own products and connect content to something meaningful to them will perpetuate understanding. This will allow students to demonstrate their mastery of the content. If students need more time to process information I will definitely allow students to re-do or enhance a project after it has been graded. This is best for the student, not everyone learns and understands at the same rate – I just want all students to have the opportunity to show what they know! The grade is a means of providing feedback, which is essential.

**Oakley:** Why is feedback essential?

**Tess:** So students know what they do right and what they need to improve upon. If no feedback is provided they are left in the dark, they feedback for guidance and reassurance.

**Oakley:** Wow being a teacher sounds tough, I think I’ll stick to sleeping, eating and running.

**Tess:** You’re good at those three things. Being a teacher will be tough, practicum was tough! But even after all this work I am still excited to become “Ms. Perry”. I am excited for the same reasons I was before I started, I want to work with young adults, to help prepare them for life beyond high school and want them to be successful. I am now even more excited because I have a huge stack of tools and resources. I have a better understanding of how I will reach my goal! If I am backwards designing my plan to be a teacher, I already knew my unit goals were now I have completed my first lesson.

**Oakley:** Wow, that was pretty corny.

**Tess:** Hey! I’m not done! I want to clarify my feelings of delight expressed on the big picture of us. I am happy practicum is over not because it was stressful, hard and took away from our quality time together but because I am one step closer to being an educational professional. I successfully wrote a unit I am proud of and I learned some really awesome stuff!

**Oakley:** Sounds like you’re really into learning how to be a teacher, I’d give you an A. You worked hard and you really seem to care about the quality of you work. And I know you never missed a class because I was home alone.

**Tess:** Thanks Oakley, I’d like an A too.